



T H E

American Home Missionary Society.

AND

S L A V E R Y.



THE
AMERICAN HOME MISSIONARY SOCIETY
AND
S L A V E R Y .

UNDER this title, the Secretaries of the Society, in the *Home Missionary* for March, 1853, define its position on the "vexed question." A considerable portion of the public has waited with no little anxiety, since the meeting of the Albany Congregational Convention, for some official communication of the views of that influential Society relative to the resolution on this subject, unanimously adopted by the Convention. This anxiety was greatly increased in consequence of the silence of the Society's organ. At length, after waiting more than four months, the Secretaries have made an announcement which, however satisfactory it may be to a portion of its patrons, and to those who give the subject only a partial examination, will fail to satisfy the intelligent friends of Free Missions. We propose in a spirit of kindness and candor to examine the document, to show that no change has been effected, and that none is promised, in the policy of the American Home Missionary Society in relation to slavery.

At the meeting of the Albany Convention, it was evident that there was throughout the country, among Congregationalists especially, a wide-spread and increasing dissatisfaction with the course pursued by the Society. It was known that it had more than fifty missionaries in the slave States, a large portion of whom were placed over churches who received slaveholders into their communion, and retained them without discipline, or dismissed them to join other churches, as Christians "in good and regular standing;" and it was not known that any one of those missionaries made slaveholding a bar to church fellowship. The Secretaries, in defining and justifying their past and present position, virtually admit the facts; and while they may appear to some to say that they concur in the principles of the Albany Convention, and that they will make an honest endeavor to carry them out with all fidelity, they do, in fact, only aver that they will do this so far as the resolution corresponds with the former position and policy of the Society, and the sentiments expressed by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church.

They say that "the minds of some philanthropic persons have been disturbed by the apprehension" that the Society "gives aid and comfort to the system [slavery] by

supplying it with the sanctions of religion;" or, in other words, by sustaining missionaries who preside over churches composed in part of slaveholders: and they aver that "the only thing which has even the appearance of evidence for this, is the fact that, in some forty or fifty cases, the gospel is preached in the slave States at the partial expense of this Society." This statement cannot be regarded as ingenuous. The objection of Anti-slavery Christians is *not* that the gospel is preached in the slave States by the missionaries of the A. H. M. S. Far from it. Their dissatisfaction has arisen, as is well known, from the fact that only a *partial* gospel has in general been preached by the missionaries; and especially, that discipline has not been instituted over church members for buying, selling, or holding slaves. How then can the Secretaries be justified in their assertion above quoted? Some will think it a misrepresentation of the real ground of the dissatisfaction.

The Secretaries, in endeavoring to clear the Society from the "injurious representation," as they are pleased to term it, say that "the position and action of the Society in relation to slavery, clearly show that they regard it as a great political, social, and moral evil; as a formidable hindrance to popular improvement, and especially to the spread of the gospel and the salvation of souls; that, therefore, it is a subject on which the influence of the ministry may appropriately be brought to bear; and that the missionaries who live where slavery exists are bound, in the exercise of a due discretion as to times and methods, to make their ministry tend, in the most effectual manner, to the removal of this giant evil;" and they contend that the dissatisfaction of Anti-slavery Christians is, therefore, groundless. We grant it would be if the missionaries did, in fact, "make their ministry tend, *in the most effectual manner*, to the removal of this giant evil" of slaveholding. But they do not. Both the Society and its missionaries may have very correct abstract views of the evil of slavery, and utter them, "in the exercise of a due discretion as to times and methods;" but if persistent slaveholders are fellowshipped as Christians; if church members are allowed to buy and sell their fellow-men, nay, each other, of what avail is the inculcation of truth in the Society's periodicals, or in the pulpits of its missionary pastors? **ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER THAN WORDS.** How can it be intimated by the Secretaries—when slaveholders are admitted and continued in mission churches, the same as non-slaveholders—that the ministry of their missionaries, in slave States, tends, "in the most effectual manner, to the removal of this giant evil?"

The views of the Society with reference to the evils of slavery have, according to the statement of the Secretaries, been frequently stated, and "might, it would seem, by this time, have been well understood," as they have been "distinctly made known in the Annual Reports and the Home Missionary, as well as in communications to the patrons and missionaries of the institution." The speculative views of the Secretaries are of small account unaccompanied by specific acts. Dissatisfaction, as already stated, has not arisen from a lack of such views, (though they are fewer than might be supposed from the language of the Secretaries,) but from a lack of corresponding action. We have searched the Annual Reports, and find but a single clause, during a series of years, that bears on the subject of American slavery; although readers of the statement of the Secretaries would infer from the language used, that "express and abundant declarations" have been given in them on this subject. The single clause alluded to is in the eighteenth Annual Report, and is in the following words:

"Another obstacle, and one of increasing magnitude, which may well fill the heart of philanthropy with deep concern, is the existence of that horrible anomaly in American institutions—slavery: covering so large a portion of our territory, and

enthralling more than two and a half millions of souls in a bondage worse than Egyptian, that prevents the most direct and effectual efforts for their salvation."

In the *Home Missionary* we do find, now and then, some excellent remarks on the Anti-slavery question.

The Secretaries say, in the article under review, that the "Society *does not commission slaveholders* as missionaries;" and "that if any minister in its employ becomes, either voluntarily or involuntarily, the owner of a human being, he is dropped from the list of its agents." We can but think the Society goes a little too far in dropping from the list of its agents one who becomes *involuntarily* the owner of a slave. Ownership is a legal relation, and either of the Secretaries may have a slave bequeathed or assigned to him, and thus be made an owner in law, while not cognisant of the fact. The language should have been—if any minister in his employ becomes voluntarily a slaveholder. But why this care to keep the missionaries free from the contaminations of slavery, while equal care is not taken to "discountenance" the sin in the officers and other members of the Church? Is it a greater sin for a minister to be a slaveholder than for an elder, a deacon, or a private member of the Church?

We are told by the Secretaries, that the missionaries are exhorted "to make their ministry effective in enlightening the moral sense in regard to this [slavery] and the attendant evils; . . . that they will be sustained by the Society in so doing; . . . that if the people in one city or village will not hear them, it is their duty to go to another." A church thus enlightened will enforce gospel discipline to separate from itself those who continue in known sinful practices; and a minister who does not urge the duty of excluding persistent slaveholders from the Church of Christ, cannot make his ministry effectual against their sin, and will be in no danger of being compelled to abandon the field where it exists. We are told, however, that *progress* has been made by the missionaries "in awakening the consciences of their people, and securing the appropriate action in reference to it." What action? Has a single member of a church been disciplined for holding slaves? Has a single church taken the ground that slaveholding is *prima facie* evidence that a man is not a Christian? Has any person been refused admission to a Church because he was a slaveholder? The Christian public would be benefited by knowing what "appropriate action" has taken place in either of the "forty or fifty cases" where the gospel is said to be preached by missionaries of the A. H. M. S.

The Secretaries speak of "the difficulties which environ this subject." Difficulties did not deter the early Christians from disciplining offenders; and the apostle Paul, were he now on earth, and the Actuary of the A. H. M. Society, would, we apprehend, address the forty or fifty missionary pastors in slave States after this manner: "But now I have written unto you, not to keep company—if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner;" (a slaveholder is an extortioner,) "with such a one, no, not to eat."

The Secretaries declare that their missionaries have, "in repeated cases, at the sacrifice of their own temporal interests, resigned their position and departed to other fields," when their "message" on the subject of slavery has not been well received and tolerated. We are glad to hear this, and wish that the same could be truly said of every missionary of the Society. But does this demonstrate that either the Society or the remaining missionaries are free from censure, when slaveholders are admitted to churches, &c., as has been stated?

We should be glad to learn the specific grounds of the Secretaries' "firm conviction that no other equal number of persons, in or out of the slave States, exert as great an influence as do these same missionaries, to bring the institution of slavery to be rightly regarded by those involved in it, and to induce churches to free themselves from its taint." We could point to ministers in slave States, whose ministrations have resulted in the formation of churches which refuse to admit slaveholders, and which would discipline a member who should become one, and to many missionaries and others, "in and out of the slave States," who exert a direct and powerful influence on the subject of slavery as connected with the churches. We should be glad to see the evidence that these "forty or fifty missionaries" are accomplishing more good in this direction than those to whom we refer.

The Secretaries, after stating what the Society and its missionaries in slave States actually do, mention the things they do not attempt:

1. "It does not, as some would have it, wholly withdraw from the slave States." Who "would have" them do this? Not Anti-slavery Christians, surely. They "would have" the number of missionaries there greatly increased, and have them instructed to remain there and preach the gospel—the whole gospel—and exercise gospel discipline; and, if persecuted in one city, then, and not till then, "flee into another." Verily, they will not "have gone over the cities of [this American] Israel, till the Son of Man be come," to bless their labors, and give them a name and place in the land.

2. "It does not, as some advise, make the exclusion of slaveholders from communion a condition of missionary aid." There's the rub. That is the ground of dissatisfaction. It was so before the Albany Convention, and is so still. The Society did not then exclude slaveholders; it has not since; and it avows its determination not to do so hereafter. The Secretaries imply that their reason for not doing it is, that it would "interfere with the right of churches to define their own terms of membership." We are too strict Congregationalists not to recognize the independent right of churches in this matter; and we are too well informed in relation to missionaries' efforts not to know that a Missionary Society *can refuse affording aid to churches that will admit offenders to their communion.* This they can and ought to do in relation to slavery as well as other offenses; and the plea made by some Societies, that such action would infringe upon Congregational rights of churches, is we are sorry to say, a stale pretext.

They then allude to matters and things the Society does attempt. "It is doing whatever lies *within its province* to do. No practicable measure that is embraced within its legitimate sphere is overlooked." We are amazed at this assertion, when we consider that discipline of slaveholders as such is not attempted by the missionaries, nor counselled by the Secretaries; and that, for more than two years immediately preceding the declaration, the Society's organ did not contain one word in relation to slavery, either in its missionary reports or its editorial matter. We are surprised that the intelligent men who conduct the affairs of the Society do not perceive the utter inadequacy of what they have done or attempted to do on this subject. It must appear singular even to slaveholders themselves, that it should be said that the missionaries bear "an open and unembarrassed testimony against slavery," ranking it "among the chief evils with which the gospel must grapple," while those very missionaries allow those involved in this sin to sit as unmolested church members, or give them, over their own signature, letters of commendation to other churches, as "members in good and regular standing," when, as is well

known, they would not do it in the case of members involved in any other flagrant offense.

So strong is the confidence of the Secretaries in the efficacy of the "policy" long pursued, that they avow that it is the determination of the Society to persevere in it, and "to make still more perfect proof of this efficacy." It does not intend to flee from slavery, nor signalize "its zeal by the severity of its denunciations at a distance," but to meet it on its own field—not by disfellowshipping slaveholders as church members in good and regular standing, and instituting gospel discipline, but by the "Heaven-appointed instrumentality" of speaking the truth in love "on this as on other moral questions." The negative portion of this policy has been faithfully followed. The Society has not *fled* from slavery, nor signalized its zeal, either by the severity of its denunciations, or the frequency of its remarks concerning it. We should be glad to know when the Society, by its missionaries, have properly met slavery on "its own field," thus spoken the truth on the subject, the times when, the places where, and the circumstances under which it has been uttered with uncompromising boldness. The cause of humanity might be promoted by an accurate report of the testimony thus borne in relation to it.

The Secretaries say, the Society "stands on the same ground as the great body of the New-School Presbyterian and Congregational churches, whose missionary organ it is, and is fully sustained by their action." With regard to the former body, it does, substantially; but with reference to the latter, if the meaning attached to the resolution of the Albany Convention by the body that passed it is evidence of the views of the Congregational churches, it does not. The New-School General Assembly has declared its disapprobation of slavery, and that it "is an offense against God and the Church," but it has utterly refused to disfellowship slaveholders, or require disciplinary process against them. In these respects, the Home Missionary Society and that body are on precisely the same ground. The Congregational Convention at Albany was opposed to the attitude taken by the New-School General Assembly, and intended to take an advanced position. By asserting, then, that it accords with the doings of the General Assembly, the Secretaries aver that they fall short of the meaning attached to the Albany resolution by those who so enthusiastically adopted it, and that they intend so to do in time to come. But in one particular the Society, as represented by the Secretaries, does not come up to the mark of the General Assembly. In the famous resolution of 1850, that body gravely stated that it regarded and treated slaveholders as subjects of discipline, except in those cases where slavery "is unavoidable by the laws of the State, the obligations of guardianship, or the demands of humanity;" coverts into which every slaveholder in the nation will fly; but the American Home Missionary Society does not avow its belief that slaveholding is a disciplinable offense at all, or declare that it will, in *any* case, counsel discipline for it. We do not award any praise to the General Assembly for the resolution alluded to, for no case of discipline has been reported since it was passed, and we presume none ever will be until slaveholding itself shall be generally considered an offense, and "regarded and treated in the same manner as other offenses;" but we think the American Home Missionary Society can take little credit to itself when it falls short even of what the General Assembly professed to do.

The Secretaries next cite the resolution adopted at Albany, and in allusion to it and the resolution of the General Assembly, say, "After such expressions of concurrent views of the principles and policy appertaining to this difficult and painful subject [why difficult and painful?] may not the Society, in an honest endeavor to carry

them out with all fidelity, count upon the confidence and coöperation of all true friends of freedom and humanity?" We have stated the reasons why, in our judgment, the "true friends of freedom and humanity" should be dissatisfied with the action of the American Home Missionary Society. It does not concur in the principles expressed by the Albany Convention. It does not propose to furnish aid "in the support of such ministers only" as shall make an "application of gospel discipline" to slavery, to bring "to pass the speedy abolition of that stupendous wrong." It does not propose to make any advance from its past position. It stands, in relation to this subject, where the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church did in 1850, where the Society itself did in 1849 and in 1845, and avows its purpose to continue there. Further remonstrance is therefore needed. The friends of the slave should not now slack their hands, nor do any thing to indicate their approval of the present policy of the American Home Missionary Society. There are, we acknowledge, many that take no interest in the welfare of the slave who will be ready enough to declare their satisfaction with its present position. Let no Christian abolitionist be among the number.

*